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STATINTL

Observer

WASHINGTON, June 28 — The news accounts of "fun-loving" Russian diplomats and "society osteopaths" leading Tiberian lives in England have secretly delighted, some of the most sober spies in Washington.

In the long run, they believe, Christine Keeler may prove the greatest boon to the espionage profession since Rose Greenhow tipped the Rebs on the Yankee plans at Bull Run. During the past decade, public respect for the espionage agent has skidded badly. Everybody in Washington knows a few spies and knows what a hangdog lot they have become.

Our Poor Spies

The trouble is that with the development of the Central Intelligence Agency there has been a systematic attempt to mechanize espionage, to take it away from people and turn it over to radar screens and high-altitude cameras. This is consistent, of course, with prevailing theories that people are obsolete.

For years, C.I.A. directors have been going about the country boasting that they have brought spying into the 20th century by getting rid of Mata Hari and installing the electronic peeper.

The social consequences of this were predictable. The spy, de-glamorized and reduced to an operator of machines, lost caste. It became fashionable here to sneer about them as bookkeepers and file clerks, and indeed they often fitted the image with sullen desperation.

The man invited for dinner to a spy friend's home expected to find him changing the baby's diapers and grousing about the air-conditioning breakdown at the office. One could always expect charades after dinner.

Old as Jericho

The low point in the social history of the American spy came in 1960 when the U-2 pilot, Gary Francis Powers, was shot down over Russia and publicized as the typical spy of the machine age. Instead of a James Bond, savagely civilized survivor of a thousand duels, he was a sweet-tempered Appalachian lad, an aerial tractor driver who had gone into the business for the big money.

And then, of course, there is the Christine Keeler affair in London. And [illegible] inevitable aftermath, [illegible] of lurid news stories [illegible] agency of "internal [illegible] over bureaucrats [illegible] difference whether [illegible] social osteopathy or whether the sundry international V-rings hinted at in the press are actually spy rings, as we are encouraged to believe, or whether they even exist at all.

The point is that the public image of espionage is again being revised. It is suddenly obvious, as it should have been all along, that the corruptibility quotient of the human race is still just as high as it was when Joshua sent agents into Jericho to corrupt a lady of the town.

There are, obviously, some chores that radar still cannot perform as well as the human agent. There was convincing proof of this in the spring when the Soviet scientist Oleg V. Penkovsky, another "fun-loving" Russian, since executed, was found to have betrayed secrets to the West after being corrupted by his taste for wild living.

Boon From Christine

The Christine Keeler case, with its faded Edwardian plot and its proven appeal to the prurient, confirms every fantasy of Ian Fleming, and the prestige and social standing of spies everywhere are thereby enriched. There will be less sneering now about the file clerks of the C.I.A.

For some time to come now, when spy friends call about dinner, nonspies will accept with alacrity. If the spy changes the diaper, the guest will not be dismayed. Instead, he will discreetly study those tell-tale sunburn circles around the spy's eyes and wonder if perhaps last week he swam in the pool of a society optometrist in Izmir.

If charades are suggested after dinner, the guest will go along with the hoax in good spirit, knowing his host would certainly prefer charades to a Rumanian killer in Lisbon.

Politicians who all over town, [illegible] have been standing taller for the past two weeks. Was Keeler has given them a new issue on the public imagination.